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ABSTRACT

When the University of Georgia's Department of Educational Leadership was formed from the merger of two earlier departments, the new entity developed an innovative doctoral program in educational leadership that incorporated principles of problem-based and student-based learning. The program was designed to promote the values, knowledge, and skills that educational leaders need to renew and improve schools and school districts. The initial group of students in the program were 10 experienced educational leaders who began course work in Fall, 1993. A faculty planning team agreed on certain presuppositions for the core 20-hour sequence of Professional Development Seminars. These seminars engaged students in problem finding, problem analysis, and solution finding as ways to renew and improve educational organizations. The instructional design assumed that students would be responsible for organizing and sequencing instruction about content from instructors, data collected from the host school district, and deliberations among themselves. A qualitative framework for evaluation of the seminars was used. Issues that emerged included the importance of building trust, taking risks, negotiating new roles, and expectations about resources (sources of knowing and validating knowing). An appendix is a 10-page introduction from a comprehensive study of the Clarke County School District (Georgia) written by the 1993-94 doctoral student team. Contains four references. (JB)

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Using a PBL Student-Centered Approach to Doctoral Study

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The Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Georgia was created in June 1991 upon the administrative merger of the former Department of Educational Administration and the former Department of Curriculum and Supervision. The merger was intended to result in: (1) improved academic programs, (2) enhanced opportunities for faculty development, cooperation, and productivity, and (3) more efficient and effective use of faculty, time, and resources. Above all, the new structure presented a unique and exciting opportunity for faculty to rethink the meaning of educational leadership and how best to prepare educational leaders for the challenges of rapidly changing social, economic, and political realities.

In March 1992, three existing program areas of Educational Administration, Supervision, and Curriculum and Instruction were merged into a single program area of Educational Leadership. Previously, the Department offered 9 graduate programs within the three majors. The program merger resulted in a downsizing to 3 graduate programs (M.S., Ed.S., and Ed.D.) within a single major. In addition, seventeen courses were eliminated by combining similar courses and deleting courses that were judged inappropriate to the direction of the new Department.

The educational leadership faculty reviewed and considered aspects of inventive programs at other institutions described in publications and reports of the Danforth Foundation, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration, and the University Council on Educational Administration. Several members of the

faculty had read and discussed the book, Problem Based Learning for Administrators by Bridges and Hallinger, as well as conference papers describing problem-based learning. The University of Georgia had earlier participated in the first three cycles of the Danforth Foundation's Professors of School Administration Program, which had also stimulated thinking and discussion about program change. Finally, two professors participated as Danforth Fellows in the Institute for Problem-Based Learning for Educational Administration at Stanford University in Spring 1993.

An innovative doctoral program in Educational Leadership that incorporates principles of problem-based and student-based learning was implemented at the University of Georgia in the Fall 1993 quarter. The program was designed to promote the values, knowledge, and skills that educational leaders need to renew and improve schools and school districts. The program emphasizes sensitivity to the school context, a problem-solving perspective, and a reflective, action orientation. Relating educational theory to practice is a focus in all course work. The development of interpersonal competence and integrity, as well as professional expertise, are fundamental objectives.

A core of four required seminars represented the centerpiece of the new doctoral program and the focus of attempts to improve the nature and quality of instruction in the Department. The seminar design is modelled after the problem-based learning approach that has been implemented in some of the most well

respected medical schools in the United States and North America. The problem-based approach calls for less of the traditional lecture format and more emphasis on independent learning and problem solving (Albanese and Mitchell, 1993).

In problem-based learning, the following steps guide instruction: 1) students encounter or identify an issue which offers a problem of professional practice; 2) they engage in problem-solving and identify learning needs and resources in a group interactive process; 3) they apply newly gained knowledge to the problem; and 4) summarize what has been learned (Barrows, 1985). Students become actively involved in discussing compelling issues, while receiving appropriate corrective feedback from faculty (Wilkerson and Feletti, 1989). The role of the faculty is to facilitate problem-solving by guiding, probing, and supporting the students' learning initiatives, rather than to lecture or provide direct instruction (Kaufman, et al., 1989).

Ten experienced educational leaders were selected to participate as students in the doctoral program and began course work as an intact group in Fall 1993. Twenty quarter hours of doctoral seminars taken over a calendar year comprised a common core experience. The seminars focused on the study of issues of practice encountered in an urban school district in Georgia. Students took additional courses during their enrollment in the program as determined by individual interests, including research tools and electives. This mix of problem-based learning and

traditional course work is recommended as most beneficial by the most recent available research (Albanese and Mitchell, 1993).

Students enrolled in the doctoral seminars worked as a team for four consecutive quarters under the direct guidance of two faculty members, with other members of the faculty available as resources. Each quarter, two different faculty members shared primary responsibility for guiding the students' learning. During the 1993 Fall Quarter, the selected school district's demographic, economic, social, and political characteristics were examined and preliminary interviews with administrators, supervisors, teachers, students, and community members were conducted. Theoretical, philosophical, and moral issues which become apparent in the district were considered during the Winter Quarter. The Spring Quarter was devoted primarily to questions of policy and planning for change. Finally, in the 1994 Summer Quarter, the student team collectively produced and presented a report that summarized findings and recommendations.

This innovative approach was intended to generate direct benefits for faculty and students, who would learn to work as members of an inquiry-focused team around issues related to the improvement of professional practice. The cooperating school district, its staff, students, and community would also benefit through an objective assessment of issues, structures, and processes that can provide the focus for change. Thus, co-reform could be simultaneously achieved on two levels of the educational enterprise with possible long-term benefits for both.

The first cycle of the doctoral core seminars was designed and taught by seven faculty members, including, Drs. Fred D. Carver, Gerald R. Firth, Carl D. Glickman, Robert D. Heslep, C. Thomas Holmes, Edward Pajak, and C. Kenneth Tanner. The presuppositions, aims, instructional design, and activities agreed on by this team and incorporated into the core seminars are described on the pages that follow. Next, a summary of the results of a formal evaluation of the seminars, conducted by a doctoral student in the Department of Adult Education at the University of Georgia (Frances Rees), are presented, followed by some comments about the current state of the seminar program. Finally, the "Introduction" section of the final report (grey paper) that was prepared by the students and presented to the school district's superintendent and central office staff is included as an Appendix.

Presuppositions

A 20 hour sequence of EDL 899 Professional Development Seminars constituted the core portion of the EDL Doctoral Program. Certain presuppositions about these core seminars were agreed upon by the faculty planning team:

1. Even though the core sequence identifies and explores topics, issues, and themes important for the whole EDL Doctoral Program, it is only a portion of the entire program. Many other hours of course work will be required of students. Hence, the core sequence does not pretend to provide students with their

only opportunity for intellectual engagement with these topics, issues, and themes. Other courses will enable students to pursue these matters in greater depth.

2. The core sequence plainly recognizes that the EDL Doctoral Program is oriented to the practitioner, not the academician. The emphasis given by the core to an actual educational context is obvious evidence of this recognition. At the same time, the core assumes that the student of a practical situation must be guided by theoretical and methodological principles, information, and skills from academic disciplines. Accordingly, it interweaves those principles, information, and skills with the study of the practical context.

3. The ostensible and intended format of the core sequence is the seminar, not the class. On the negative side, this format means that lectures will be given on an as-needed basis. On the positive side, the format means that students and faculty together will do whatever is required to germinate and cultivate ideas for an understanding of educational situations. Visiting faculty will be invited to help with special problems. Seminar meeting hours will be adjusted from time to time to accommodate special problems.

4. The students enrolled in the core sequence will have an Ed.S. degree or its equivalent and at least one year of experience as an educational leader. Therefore, they will bring to the seminars a sizable fund of academic knowledge and

practical experience. That knowledge and experience will provide a substantial basis from which the seminars may proceed.

5. Even though the core sequence will focus upon a public school context, it is not thereby implied that educational leadership is exclusively a matter of leadership in the public schools. The sequence, along with the EDL Doctoral Program as a whole, views educational leadership as an element in any sort of education context, whether business, military, religious, health, or public school.

Description of Seminars

The core seminars engage students in problem finding, problem analysis, and solution finding as ways to renew and improve educational organizations. The context for the development of newly revised or reaffirmed understandings and advanced skills is a specific school district. Students are expected to develop understandings and skills primarily through their readings of the extant and emerging literature on educational leadership for school improvement, organizational change and development, educational policy analysis, social foundations of the school, curriculum leadership, and technology. Instructors are available to guide and assist as needed.

Aims of the Seminars (and total program)

The faculty of the department agreed that the entire academic program, and the seminars specifically, should aim to

prepare educational leaders who:

* understand the importance of context in practice;
* are committed to improving public education by promoting principles of social justice and equity;
* are flexible and creative in overcoming obstacles to change;
* demonstrate a commitment to the development of students;
* promote respect for diversity;
* have a propensity for action supported by inquiry and reflective practice;
* show appreciation for collective decision making and are dedicated to creating opportunities for authentic involvement; and
* accept responsibility for the outcomes of their professional decisions.

Instructional Design

It was expected that students would be primarily responsible for organizing and sequencing instruction about content from instructors, data collected from the host school district, and deliberations among themselves. The curricular model that best illustrates the intended connections among content, students, instructors, and the practice site is that of spiraling content. Deviations occasionally occurred because of limitations of time, the accessibility of instructors, the peculiarities of the

context, and the normal difficulties associated with attempting new approaches.

The seminar cycle began in the Fall Quarter, 1993, with the first seminar meeting devoted to communicating philosophy, intent, and expectations. A NOVA video, "Can We Make A Better Doctor?," was shown and discussed. The expected outcomes at the end of each quarter and for the entire cycle were also delineated (See Figure 1). Each student was expected to produce a personal "white paper" during each of the first three quarters in which one or more problematic situations in the host district was described. The situation was analyzed in terms of theoretical and philosophical perspectives drawn from each of six areas that comprised the content themes for the seminars. The "white paper" included an action plan for improvement, growing out of the description and analysis. State differently, a perspective from each of the following six content themes:

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

EDUCATIONAL POLICY ANALYSIS

SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF THE SCHOOL

CURRICULUM LEADERSHIP

TECHNOLOGY FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

was used to inform an analysis of the problematic situation and the proposed action plan.

Each student was also expected to contribute to a "grey paper," a lengthier group-generated document following the same

FIGURE 1

NEW EDL DOCTORAL PROGRAM
ASSESSMENT, APPRAISAL AND EVALUATION

	Individual Proficiencies	Group Membership	Project Contributions
Pre-Program	Interview Folder		
Quarter 1	Advisor Interview(s) Team Interview(s) Advisee Program Plan Paper A White Paper Assignment	Observation Self-Analysis Peer Analysis	Observation Progress Report on Grey Paper
Quarter 2	Advisor Interview(s) Team Interview(s) Advisee Program Revision Paper B White Paper Assignment	Observation Self Analysis Peer Analysis	Observation Progress Report on Grey Paper
Quarter 3	Advisor Interview(s) Team Interview(s) Advisee Program Revision Paper C White Paper Assignment	Observation Self Analysis Peer Analysis	Observation Progress Report on Grey Paper
Quarter 4	Advisor Interview(s) Team Interview(s) Advisee Program Revision Paper D	Observation Self Analysis Peer Analysis	Observation Final Report on Grey Paper Report Presentation

NOTES:

1) White Paper Assignments and Grey Paper refers to individual and group papers, respectively, described in the EDL 899 Seminar Syllabus for First Cycle Doctoral Core Seminars. These are the "content" products expected of students.

2) Self Reflection Papers A-D, Advisor, and Team Interviews are intended as opportunities for participants to reflect on their personal values, beliefs, and meanings as a result of program experiences.

TEAM PORTFOLIO REVIEW

format as the individual "white paper" with respect to one or more problematic situations in the host school district. The problematic situation(s), critical perspectives, and action plans growing out of reflective analysis were expected to emerge from deliberations of the students. The "grey paper" was completed at the end of the year-long cycle and presented at a formal meeting to the superintendent and other district office administrators.

Students were also asked to keep a log or journal describing their experiences during the seminar and to hand-in a brief paper at the end of each quarter (Papers A, B, C, & D in Figure 1) in which they reflected upon their personal growth as individuals and as members of the group. At least two faculty assigned to the seminar each quarter read, commented upon, and returned all written assignments.

Activities performed during and resulting from plans made in the seminar were intended to assist the students in accomplishing their tasks. The students determined which specific information to obtain from district records, personnel, and other sources in order to prepare the final papers. While it was necessary to collect additional data during the final quarter (mainly as a reality check), the last quarter (Summer 1994) was devoted primarily to preparing the individual and collective documentation of work and reporting of results.

The first meeting of the seminar was attended by the entire team of seven instructors and several additional interested department faculty members. Ideally, all members of the team of

instructors would (literally) be available to the students all during the cycle--and especially at each of the scheduled Saturday morning sessions. As a practical matter, two faculty members were scheduled to meet with the cadre of students every Saturday morning during each of the four quarters. Other team members--or invited specialists--joined the seminars as needed. The scheduling of the particular faculty each quarter was based on a probable order of the introductory treatment of the content themes, given the identification of faculty with thematic areas.

Data collection typically occurred "between" seminar dates, but occasionally substituted for a Saturday morning seminar meeting. Students began "learning the site" by obtaining basic information about organizational structures, processes, programs, personnel, and students. Such data served only to begin the critical examination of the district, however. As insights were gained, puzzles identified, and hypotheses formed by examining data and critical reflection against theoretical and philosophical perspectives, more specific data was obtained throughout the first three quarters.

Schedule of Activities

Except for the first seminar meeting, which was structured and led by faculty who worked with students during Fall Quarter, students developed the calendar of seminar activities. Primary faculty (those assigned each a quarter), of course, were

available to counsel and advise but not "take over" the scheduling.

Faculty Assignments and Areas of Interest

Each of the seven faculty members who comprised the seminar team during the 1993-94 cycle identified areas of personal interest or expertise. Students were encouraged, but not required, to seek out these individuals for information related to the seminar themes. Faculty assignments and areas of interest follow:

Fall Quarter 1993 and Summer Quarter 1994

Carver - Educational leadership for school improvement, reflective practice, organizational change and development.

Firth - Curriculum leadership, reflective practice, linking theory to practice.

Pajak - Overall coordinator, educational leadership for school improvement, organizational change and development, reflective practice.

Winter Quarter 1994

Glickman - Educational leadership for school improvement, reflective practice, social dimensions of the school.

Heslep - Social dimensions of the school, philosophy as perspective and method.

Spring Quarter 1994

Holmes - Educational policy analysis, inquiry and analysis, technology.

Tanner - Educational policy analysis, reflective practice, linking theory to practice, data analysis, technology.

Evaluation

A qualitative framework for evaluation of the seminars was used (Patton, 1986). Data were collected through direct observations of seminar meetings, interviews with students and faculty, participation in faculty debriefings, surveys, in-class evaluations, student reflection papers, and departmental documents. Analysis consisted of identifying emergent issues, triangulating these issues with those cited in a review of problem-based studies in the literature (Albanese and Mitchell, 1993), and then drawing conclusions evidenced by the actual words of program participants and faculty.

Issues that emerged in the preliminary analysis of data included: building trust, taking risks, negotiating new roles, and expectations about resourcing (sources of knowing and validating knowing). Subsumed under the broader category of faculty-learner relationship, the shape of all four issues was contoured by how this relationship was acted out. Where faculty positioned themselves in regard to their knowledge, how they guided or directed students, and the manner in which they provided feedback signalled a faculty-learner relationship that

ranged somewhere on a continuum from expert-to-expert talk at one end to expert-to-novice talk at the other.

Study results suggested that no one "right" position on the continuum was appropriate for every learning situation in which the students engaged. Because the cohort had a great deal of academic and professional experience, the relationship usually most beneficial seemed to be that of expert-to-expert, as might be expected in continuing professional education, but not as familiar in traditionally oriented academic settings. In some cases, faculty took this approach. At other times, the direction of the learning dipped into specific content and skill areas which were unfamiliar to learners. The resulting shift in status which positioned learners as novices changed the dynamic between faculty and learners, and often created obstacles to learning instead of facilitating it.

If faculty know to expect such shifts in position, and can learn to anticipate and respond to them appropriately, some of these obstacles can be surmounted. Occasionally analyzing actual verbal interactions immediately after they occurred, proved successful in foregrounding asymmetrical power relations that were a barrier to learning. Structured time for critical reflection by the group, faculty debriefings after seminars, and intermittent surveys provided ways to monitor the faculty-learner relationship, keep faculty sensitive to their behaviors, and generate data needed to successfully guide the learning. These

design features should be incorporated into the instructional design by program planners.

A major conclusion drawn from the data is that an adjustment to changing interpersonal dynamics between professors and students and deliberate planning are essential to the effective implementation of this type of program. In this particular instance, there was little detailed pre-planning activity due to the nature of the student-centered design and the fact that this approach was new. Much of the faculty's attention and efforts were also diverted to winning approval for the program at the department and school levels. Although two faculty had participated in PBL training and another professor had been a member of a student-centered learning program at another university, planning the experience was still very novel. The fact is that team planning and teaching are neither institutionally valued nor practiced in most universities and many professors like that arrangement.

Also, even though individual faculty members understood intellectually what problem-based and student-centered meant to them, they did not anticipate how their differing expectations might be problematic to program implementation. Concurrently, students brought to this novel experience some "baggage" of their own, namely, expectations about the roles faculty and students were expected to play, as well as paradigms about legitimate sources of knowledge.

Deliberately restructuring professor-student roles would require faculty to agree on what they as a group envision to be ideal, as well as, how to facilitate that outcome. It would not be practical or especially beneficial for facilitation styles of faculty to be identical, yet some general agreement should exist as to where on the continuum of student-centeredness the program is aimed (i.e., novice-to-expert versus expert-to-expert). This decision should be based on the characteristics (age, experience, level of academic preparation, etc.) of the students as well as what faculty intend problem-based learning to be.

In this case study, the matter of who defined the problem, students or faculty, did not influence the degree of student-centeredness as greatly as how students and faculty interacted. Despite the fact that faculty set the parameters and expectations for the seminar, the process could be labelled student-centered because students ultimately "took control" of the learning process and content. While faculty definitions of their role were a key determinant, students were able to "negotiate" with faculty the degree of control for which each, faculty and students, was responsible. Several students noted in interviews that the more they coalesced as a team, the more student-centered they perceived the approach of faculty to be. Similarly, as far as faculty were concerned, the better the students worked as a team, the better able they were to direct their own learning.

As the year progressed, faculty also became more comfortable with letting students take charge. They felt that they could, in

all good conscience, "step back" and allow students to set the pace, direction, and content of their learning. Perhaps an increased confidence in the learning approach itself contributed to the faculty's ability to "step back" as well as to students' confidence that they could take control for their own learning.

Other Comments

A second cycle of the doctoral seminars was begun in Fall 1994 and is currently underway. Unlike the first group, this second cohort includes several full-time students who aspire to teach in higher education. Given the presuppositions stated earlier, the appropriateness of including these students in the problem-based learning experience was hotly debated by the faculty. It was finally decided that these students would benefit from this innovative approach to learning because they could draw on the seminar experience later in their careers as an alternative to traditionally structured classroom practices. The mix of part-time and full-time students, however, has added another complicating dimension to the issue of status and power relationships that the second cohort has had to grapple with.

Two related concerns about this approach to graduate study--efficient use of time and application of information and knowledge--have resulted in recent discussion among faculty about redesigning the experience for the next cycle in 1995-96. The version of student-centered, problem-based learning described here, has required substantial allocations of faculty and seminar

time for dealing with issues of interpersonal dynamics and group process. As with any group, the student team will sometimes pursue ill-conceived strategies, overlook relevant information, fail to seek out or use expertise, reject obvious solutions, and vacillate between equally futile displays of helplessness and obstinacy during its meetings. While significant valuable learning undoubtedly occurs, a question of whether these efforts are the best use of time and energy lingers. As a consequence, faculty in the department are now discussing how the seminar experience might be restructured more purposefully for subsequent cycles. A persistent issue for the department is how (and whether) this structure can be achieved in a manner that remains consistent with the assumptions of problem-based and student-centered learning.

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The "Appendix" that follows is a 10 page "Introduction" from an 89 page comprehensive study of the Clarke County School District (grey paper) written by the 1993-94 Doctoral Study Team in the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Georgia.

APPENDIX

Members of the Doctoral Study Team

Department of Educational Leadership

The University of Georgia

1993-94

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Introduction

Overview/Recent History of the District

Athens-Clarke County, located in northeast Georgia, presented an interesting and challenging study in contrasts for the Doctoral Study Team. Athens-Clarke is geographically the smallest county in Georgia, but it has a fairly large, and growing, population--approximately 90,000. In many ways it retains a small town flavor, despite its steady growth. Anchored by the University of Georgia, the area is home to an unusually high number of citizens with four or more years of college, about 38%. At the same time, more than 20% have never finished high school, and an additional 22% have not gone beyond high school. Similar disparities are found in level of income: while nearly 17% have household incomes of $50,000 or more, 27% earn less than $10,000 yearly (The Georgia County Guide, 1993).

These compelling numbers present an array of challenges and problems for the community and the Clarke County School District. In addition, the school district faces such matters as

- the disparity between countywide and school district racial makeup (the county is approximately 70% white, while the public schools are nearly 55% African-American);
- competition from neighboring counties and from private schools;
- the legacy of the school district's previous administration, and the resulting loss of public confidence and trust; and
- the change from an appointed to an elected local school board.

The district was in serious trouble when the current Superintendent took office two years ago. The schools were facing a $10 million debt

and the previous superintendent and two associate superintendents had enountered major legal difficulties regarding their handling of district financial responsibilities. There was a serious erosion of support within both the schools and the community, and there were virtually no plans in place to address future academic or infrastructure needs.

The current administration has taken significant steps to restore public trust and get the district back on solid footing in the past two years. Initial efforts included a comprehensive plan by the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent for District Services to restore financial stability and improve efficiency. The district was out of debt within one year, and the local millage rate was lowered.

The district then set about clearly mapping out priorities and objectives for the next five years. A collaborative group of school personnel and community leaders created an eight-part Strategic Plan (Clarke County School District, 1993), setting goals in curriculum, instruction and assessment, technology, school environment, student support, community networks, and communications. The Strategic Plan describes a school district that is committed to the education of all children, and to creating a safe, nurturing environment for that purpose; that "believes in the worth of all individuals and values their diversity;" that invites the active participation of all personnel in decision-making; and that emphasizes the need for ongoing cooperation and collaboration between the schools and the community at large.

The return to fiscal and programmatic equilibrium provided the foundation needed to pursue and implement new programs. The system has also aggressively sought additional outside funding, and has been awarded more than $2 million for innovative projects in the last two years.

Some of the ongoing initiatives include:

- *Next Generation Schools Project* - supported by lottery and state funds, this project provides for a technology infrastructure in each of the schools and throughout the district;
- *Pre-Kindergarten Program* - initially (1992) one of twenty pilot sites, this lottery funded program is scheduled to serve approximately 400 at-risk four-year-old children and their families in 1995;
- *Family Connection/Y.E.S.*- with the Clarke County School District acting as the fiscal agent, this interagency collaborative meets regularly to discuss and coordinate social services for youth and their families;
- *Clarke County Mentor Program-* this program brings local community and business members into the schools to provide caring, guidance, and support for students;
- *SREB High Schools That Work-* a comprehensive restructuring effort that combines challenging courses and modern vocational studies for career-bound students;
- *SACS School Renewal Program-* a process for restructuring schools to achieve accreditation, utilizing the principles of John Goodlad;
- *After-school programs-* located at elementary and middle schools, these programs provide structured after-school activities for students;
- *"Crossroads" alternative school grant-* currently being implemented by the district, this grant will help fund additional

services for students at the Alternative Placement Program and the P.M. School;

- *Homeless Education Program-* this program serves the special needs of homeless students in the school district.

With these new programs in place, and with future directions clearly established, the district is poised to move with assurance into the next century. Nonetheless, many major problems and challenges remain, and it will require the continuing creativity and cooperation of the district and the community to keep pace. The purpose of this study is to add some perspective and insight to those challenges and problems.

Methods and Procedures

Much of the fall quarter of 1993 was devoted to defining the nature, scope, and purpose of a comprehensive study. Five broad purposes were ultimately established:

- to create a useful report for the Clarke County School District;
- to develop a better understanding of the intricate workings of a school district;
- to enhance the Team members' ability to address real school problems creatively;
- to learn, through active practice, about group process; and
- to examine the validity of a problem-solving, project-oriented approach to doctoral study.

The Team then began to create a list of key questions, focusing on twelve major areas: finance, curriculum, instruction, facilities, philosophy, organizational patterns, human resources, history, community, support

systems, and students/clients. An exploratory period followed, as issues were brought into clearer focus. This period included meetings with the Superintendent, Associate Superintendent, and other key personnel; touring the district; visiting schools and meeting staff; and writing individual papers on key issues in Clarke County. The progress of the study was discussed at weekly four-hour seminars, held each Saturday morning.

The study intensified with examinations of district and county statistics, and of school district documents including the Strategic Plan, Instructional Review, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) reports, Clarke County Policy Manual, fiscal year 1994 budget, Facilities Plan, organizational charts, district publications, and others (see Appendices). After four months of preliminary work and "fine tuning," the Team was finally ready to get out in force and meet with school personnel and community members. The ten team members divided themselves into two groups of five, with one group looking primarily at internal issues (*e.g.*, curriculum, instruction, facilities), and the other focusing on external issues (*e.g.*, community relations and perceptions). Nearly two hundred interviews were conducted, with central office staff, school administrators, teachers, support staff, students, parents, and other community members from the end of the winter quarter through the spring of 1994. Team members also attended Board of Education (BOE) and Parent Advisory Board (PAB) meetings, and observed classes. Most of the investigation/inquiry took place between February and mid-May, 1994, and reflects the status of the school district at that time. Changes or new initiatives that occurred after that time may not be reflected in this report.

It was soon obvious that the Team needed to narrow the focus of the study--a comprehensive look at an entire school system is indeed a major

undertaking. By the middle of the spring quarter, it was becoming clear that five major themes were emerging throughout the study: trust, communication, race, initiatives, and curriculum. These five were subsequently reduced to four by integrating initiatives into the other areas. After deciding to use these themes to organize the study, Team members sought to fill in informational gaps and "triangulate" data by doing more investigation and conducting additional interviews or re-interviews.

The four themes--trust, communication, race, and curriculum--form the study reported in the following chapters. Although the four are interrelated, trust was the most pervasive--and most important--theme and, thus, comes first in the report. Trust is a major concern for all schools, as described in further detail below. Moreover, Clarke County has had to deal with potentially disastrous trust issues, and has done so effectively, with expedience, candor, and grace. Still, the recent history of the district reveals how fragile and tenuous a trust relationship can be, especially if it is not continually monitored and nurtured.

The Clarke County School District does not operate in a vacuum. It is affected by the social trends and currents that influence all our societal institutions. These trends and currents, outlined in the last section of this introduction, have made it increasingly difficult for all schools to establish and maintain the trust they need to have if they are to be successful in the continually expanding roles that society has assigned to them.

Broad Social Themes Impacting Clarke County

The issues unearthed in discussions with school personnel, parents, students, and community members are not limited to Clarke County

schools, or, for that matter, to the field of education. Rather, these issues reflect powerful, pervasive current trends and indicate a general societal distrust of professional organizations and public institutions, including schools. Briefly, these trends include:

1) Growing societal mistrust of institutions: Schon (1983) points out in The Reflective Practitioner that our society has become increasingly cynical and mistrustful towards professional and public institutions. Ironically, these doubts come even as we continue to rely more and more on professional expertise. Widely publicized abuses of power and the public trust have certainly contributed to these feelings. However, this "crisis of confidence in the professions" (p. 14) is due, in greater part, to the mismatch between professional knowledge and the "complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflicts which are increasingly perceived as central to the world of professional practice" (p. 14). In short, in education as in other areas, distrust stems from the painful realization that *there are no simple answers to complex issues.* A teacher thoroughly well-versed in his or her academic discipline might be at a loss when trying to motivate a classful of youngsters who deal daily with poverty, crime, drugs, and families in crisis.

A related issue is what the popular media have referred to as the disenfranchisement of the "post-baby-boomers" or "Generation X," as they have come to be known. In this analysis, today's youngsters have been described as disillusioned, bored, selfish, not motivated by work, overly individualistic, and even nihilistic. Perhaps these characterizations are creations of the media. They are seen by some as overly sweeping generalizations about today's youngsters, or they may not be statements

about the character of today's young people as much as they are an acknowledgment that the current crop of students faces an increasingly hostile economy even if they do finish school. Whichever interpretation is most accurate, it is a fact that many students, in Clarke County as elsewhere, see school as irrelevant or merely tangential to their real interests and needs.

*2) **Racial and ethnic polarization:*** Rather than celebrating our racial and ethnic diversity in this country, in many instances our differences have been allowed to produce what Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (1991) refers to as the "disuniting of America." It is true that a democracy must protect the rights of individuals and groups, but a democracy also depends on the ability to find and nurture common beliefs and needs. "Instead of a transformative nation with an identity all its own," according to Schlesinger, "America... is seen as preservative of diverse alien identities....America increasingly sees itself as composed of groups more or less ineradicable in their ethnic character. The multiethnic dogma abandons historic purposes, replacing assimilation by fragmentation, integration by separatism" (p. 17).

In our schools, racial and ethnic polarization has resulted in divisive arguments over what kind of curriculum, what norms and expectations, and even what versions of history are appropriate for a particular racial or ethnic group. Schools find themselves "held hostage" to meeting the different, competing, needs of various groups, and are often unable to move beyond these squabbles to find the commonalities that will allow for trust, collaboration, and understanding.

*3) **Political polarization:*** The ability of schools to fulfill their mission has been undermined by the specific, narrow, and conflicting political views and agendas of various special interest groups. These issues have been particularly disruptive in the areas of sex education, outcome-based education, special education, religion/prayer in the schools, and moral education. As with racial and ethnic polarization, these differences also stand in the way of establishing trust and finding common ground and mutual goals.

*4) **Fear of increasing crime and violence:*** Schools reflect wider social issues and problems, including those of increasing social disorder, crime, and violence. Schools receive much of the blame for these ills and are often expected to resolve these problems, even when they go unresolved in the society at large. The perceived inability of schools to insure safe, orderly places where young people can learn has seriously eroded public trust and confidence.

A Final Word

The Team does not represent this report as the most definitive, exhaustive study ever done on the Clarke County School District. It is intended to be an overview of critical issues from a perspective outside the school district. Rather than a statistical item-by-item analysis, it is an investigation of attitudes and perceptions of CCSD employees, clients, families, and community members. It is hoped that the insights presented are in some way useful in helping the district understand more about itself.

Finally, the Doctoral Study Team believes that there is much to say about this approach to graduate study. It is an approach that compels

doctoral students to test their ideas and theories in the crucible of real-life issues. It is not easy, and it is sometimes messy. The Team members have learned a great deal, sometimes by trial and error, about schools, leadership, research, local politics, decision-making, and group process. The hope is that this experience will pave the way for future practitioner/students to conduct research and learn more about education.

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